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Chapter Author(s): Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix

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Introduction

Envisioning Ambiguity
Fairy Tale Films

Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix

> *Who owns fairy tales? To be blunt: I do. And you do. We can each claim fairy tales for ourselves. Not as members of a national or ethnic folk group—as French, German, or American. Not as nameless faces in a sea of humanity. And not in the Disney model as legal copyright owners. We claim fairy tales in every individual act of telling and reading.*
>
> Donald Haase, 1993a (71–72)

Fairy tales are fictional narratives that combine human and nonhuman protagonists with elements of wonder and the supernatural. They come in traditional (usually collected from oral tellers) or literary (formally composed and written) forms. Each traditional fairy tale telling forms a copy for which there is no original. Every version offers a snapshot—a view of that story in time and space that refers to its sources and predecessors—but fidelity to an original is profoundly beside the point. Though readers, hearers, viewers, and tellers may perceive the first version they encounter as the genuine, authentic text, as Donald Haase argues, the single-authored, written version cannot be assumed as the model for understanding fairy tales.[1] With their own specific meanings and uses, fairy tales speak with as well as about their tellers, audiences, contexts of performance, and sociocultural backgrounds. They thus offer different visions.

1 Indeed, literary texts do not constrain filmmakers like Walt Disney. The Disney version of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid," for example, closes with a happily-ever-after that is entirely absent from the original tragedy (see Bendix 1993). More consideration of Disney's cultural politics of tradition can be found in Bell, Haas, and Sells (1995).

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Fairy tales provide intertexts par excellence. Though the term *intertextuality* has a disputed history, following Julia Kristeva, we understand it as the quality of the fairy tale to be a structure that "does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to *another* structure . . . an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning) . . . a dialogue among . . . the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context" (emphases in original, 1980, 64–65). Jack Zipes alludes to this generic quality of fairy tales when he argues that "we know, almost intuitively, that a particular narrative is a fairy tale" (1996, 1). A genre comprises a series of narrative conventions, including characterization, plot, and style, common to each iteration of a story. But traditional genres go further: their patterns fall into recognizable and specific forms. Thus, beginning in the early-twentieth century, folktales were classified into types. With the move from text to context and performance in 1970s folkloristics (see Ben-Amos 1971), the tale-type index (now in its third revision; Uther 2004) fell into some disrepute. Yet the authors' references in this book to tale types, or "ATU" numbers,[2] are not anachronistic. Instead, they draw readers' attention to the specifics of fairy tale intertextuality—that each story is international as well as local, and that the commonalities among texts extend into different modes of representation, including film.

But traditional fairy tales are not the only forms of the genre with a distinct intertextuality. Indeed, even literary fairy tales arguably differ from other forms of fiction. Linda Dégh puts it this way:

> We cannot speak of authenticity in our [Euro North American] sense before the 1940s. The general public did not distinguish between oral narrator and tale writer and regarded published stories as common property free for anyone to change. Scholarly recording of oral tales from the folk, at the same time, meant notation of a skeleton content of stories judged to be genuine. Style editing along the lines of existing models then embellished the tales to reflect more the style of the

2 The ATU numbering system refers to Hans-Jörg Uther's (2004) revision of the Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson work (1961), which classified folktales into types based upon plot and sequence of *motifs* (recurrent patterns or ideas found in traditional culture). The original was criticized, among many other reasons, because it "(1) overlooks gender identity in its labeling of motifs, thus lumping male and female actions or characters under the same, male-identified, heading or (2) disregards female activity or (3) focuses on male activity at the cost of female" (Lundell 1986, 150). We use it to alert our readers to the multiple and international qualities of traditional folktales and give them a source for further exploration of individual tale types.

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> collector than that of the raconteur. Texts the scholars regarded as folk-alien, inauthentic, corrupt, or retold from a book were omitted. Small wonder that most published collections reflect the wishful thinking of folklorists, not the real folk repertoire: an oral tradition of miscellaneous provenience. . . . The "genuine" tale is the one told and listened to irrespective of its literary antecedents. (1991, 70–72)

As Dégh's comments suggest, the fairy tale genre has long been a shape shifter and medium breaker—generically ambiguous. Even when its oral forms were fixed in print—and often expurgated or moralized over—by collectors of traditional culture—most notoriously the Grimm brothers—that process failed to limit the texts to a single form. The Grimms (and others) edited successive versions for publication, changing them to fit their notions of appropriateness.[3]

Indeed, the movement of traditional fairy tales to cinematic form may have enabled their commodification in capitalist socioeconomic structures, but filmed fairy tales are as much the genuine article as their telling in a bedtime story or an anthology. Thus, the present work approaches fairy tale film not as a break with tradition but a continuation of it. Our question is not how successfully a film translates the tale into a new medium but, instead, what new and old meanings and uses the filmed version brings to audiences and sociocultural contexts.[4] The authors, then, address the specific shapes of fairy tale films as a subgenre of fairy tales—as experiments, departures, and innovations in genre and intertext.

Why can the fairy tale seemingly weather vast historical and geographical changes? Kay Stone discusses the "deliberately enigmatic quality of wonder tales" and notes that "the mysterious nature of this genre endures, even after long years of attention by a host of writers offering their own particular interpretations" (2004, 113). Lutz Röhrich contends that they are "essential and substantial stories which offer paradigmatic examples of conflicts in decisive life situations" (1986, 1). The fairy tale film may comprise a newer subgenre, but it, too, manages to address a huge range of audiences. Most of the films discussed in this book are intended for adult audiences, though

3 Though this aspect of the Grimms' versions has long been well known among folklorists, the brothers' methods were more widely exposed in Ellis (1983); for a somewhat-more-measured reading of the Grimms' redactions, see Alderson (1993). As Donald Ward correctly comments, "Ellis criticizes the Grimms for not adhering to the rigorous demands of scholarship that in that day did not exist" (1991, 96).

4 Of course, as Dudley Andrew (1984) argues, questions of fidelity are profoundly epiphenomenal, even in literary adaptations.

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some can be considered family fare, aimed as much at the parents who are taking their children to the movies as at the kids themselves. All undoubtedly implicate adult lives and relationships.

Folklorist Bengt Holbek catalogued some particular qualities of fairy tales, as a genre of traditional narratives, which—not at all coincidentally—show their connection with film versions. First, fairy tales are told by "skilled specialists" (1998, 405), not by everyday tellers, a characteristic that underlines the place of fairy tale film, also a subgenre requiring skill and specialization, as a recognizable fairy tale variation. Second, they are texts appreciated primarily by "the lower . . . strata of traditional communities," not by "the higher strata [who] . . . usually regard them with condescension or even contempt" (Ibid.). Fairy tale film, too, with a few exceptions, is associated with contemporary popular culture, rather than with elite art. Third, fairy tales "are told by and for adults. Children may listen . . . but they are not the primary audience" (Ibid). The versions we address in this collection definitely fall into this category, though some of the films may be literally inaccessible to anyone younger than a teenager.[5] Fourth, "male and female repertoires differ" (Ibid.). Holbek suggests that men "prefer masculine fairytales, whereas women's repertoires are more evenly distributed" (Ibid., 406; he distinguishes female and male tales on the basis of the primary protagonist). Though male film auteurs overwhelmingly outnumber females, we argue that women directors' versions of fairy tales—sometimes actively feminist readings (like Nietzchka Keene's of *The Juniper Tree* (1990), discussed by Pauline Greenhill and Anne Brydon)—make gendered statements that qualitatively differ from those of men. Fifth, fairy tales are viewed as fictional, and storytellers and audiences "identify themselves with the heroes or heroines of the tales" (Ibid.). In sum "fairytales [provide] a means of collective daydreaming" (Ibid.).

Holbek, along with structuralist Vladimir Propp (1968), saw the tales he considered as explorations of family relationships. Similarly Alessandro Falassi examined the Tuscan *veglia,* "the main occasion for meeting and the place of social reality" (1980, 3), an informal gathering of family and

5 In the United States, *Pan's Labyrinth* (directed by Guillermo del Toro, 2006) received an R rating (anyone under seventeen must be accompanied by a parent or guardian); *Eyes Wide Shut* (directed by Stanley Kubrick, 1999) only narrowly missed receiving an NC-17 rating (no one under seventeen permitted); *Edward Scissorhands* (directed by Tim Burton, 1990) was rated PG-13 (some material may be inappropriate for children under thirteen); even *Enchanted* (directed by Kevin Lima, 2007) was rated PG (some material may not be suitable for children) (see *Film Ratings).*

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friends, usually in wintertime, involving many folklore genres. He argues that storytelling is "the first genre of folklore performed at the *veglia*" (Ibid., 30) and that it is aimed at an intergenerational audience, but it crucially involves the family, even to the extent of "family above society" (Ibid., 250). He believes that "the most frequently found narratives concern family values and the formation of families" (Ibid.). Perhaps this focus is part of what drew the most famous fairy tale interpreter, Walt Disney, to the form.

Fairy Tale Film Beginnings and the Disney Paratext

In her keynote address to the British Film Institute's seminar, Marina Warner traces a history of fantasy cinema beginning with Georges Méliès and his numerous fairy tale films (including a *Bluebeard* [ATU 312], three versions of *Cinderella [Cendrillon]* [ATU 510/510A], and a *Little Red Riding Hood* [ATU 333]). At the very birth of modern filmmaking, she indicates, the magic of wonder tales and folklore were key inspirations. So, too, was the artwork from the golden age of children's book illustration in the late-nineteenth century by Kay Nielsen, Arthur Rackham, Edmund Dulac, Walter Crane, and Aubrey Beardsley.[6] What made this narrative and graphic imagery so intriguing for filmmakers like Méliès was the artists' ability to tell the tale through a "multicolored skein of images with which to think about the real, both reiterating and shaping the real in restructured narratives, reassembled images" (Warner 1994, 17). It is likely that this emphasis—privileging visual form over narrative—inspired Jack Zipes's comment that filmmakers working at the fin de siècle were little interested in the richness of the folktales they adapted for the screen; instead, they were focused on driving innovation in cinematography. "Fairy tales were incidental to their work," he suggests; the real thrill for artists like Méliès came in "resolving [the] technical and aesthetic problems" in crafting his animated and live-action films (1997, 2). Walt Disney and his animator colleague Ub Iwerks differed little from Méliès in this respect.

Zipes describes Disney's rather haphazard approach to narrativizing folktales for the silver screen, beginning with the 1920s cartoons (including renditions of *Puss in Boots* [ATU 545B], *Little Red Riding Hood,* and *Cinderella),* and continuing through his Hollywood animations.

6 Arguably, more-recent illustrators like Maurice Sendak also contribute to current film readings of fairy tales (see Segal and Sendak 1973).

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Unconcerned with fidelity to the source text—from his first feature-length animated films, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (directed by David Hand) in 1937 and *Pinocchio* (directed by Hamilton Luske and Ben Sharpsteen) in 1940—Disney "bowdlerized and sanitized" the work of collectors/anthologists of traditional tales like Charles Perrault in France and the Grimm brothers in Germany, as well as the literary fairy tales of Carlo Collodi and others, to achieve his goal to create visually spectacular cinema that reinforced and reflected patriarchal, capitalist American family values (1994, 141).[7]

The subject of narrative accuracy and the rocky relationship between fairy tale films and the oral and literary traditions that preceded them raises issues about translating folk narratives across distinctive popular mediums for different audiences. Of course, fairy tales were not always for children. In fact, educators, parents, and clergy were wary when nineteenth-century publishers attempted to popularize the transcribed (and often bawdy and rough-hewn) tales in Europe and North America as family fare. Zipes comments, "At first, fairy tales were regarded as dangerous because they lacked Christian teaching and their symbols were polymorphously meaningful and stimulating. But by the end of the nineteenth century, fairy tale writers had learned to rationalize their tales and to incorporate Christian and patriarchal messages into the narratives to satisfy middle-class and aristocratic adults" (1997, 4–5).

It was perhaps the Grimm brothers, more than any other collectors, who did the most to sanitize the folktale for the nursery. But though the Grimms edited out the nasty bits of sex, they sometimes added or expanded the violence: from cannibalism to pedophilia, from matricide to graphic torture, and beyond. Walt Disney picked up the censor's scissors where the Grimms left off, further whitewashing the folk and fairy tales that he used as a textual scaffold on which to erect his cartoons. In this cleansed canon of Disney's folkloric animations, Zipes observes a deep conservatism that commodifies the fairy tale while promoting apathy and an apolitical acceptance of the status quo (1997, 6). Disney's perspective might not be so important, except that Zipes correctly observes that the company's version has become the referent for most well-known fairy tales in the Euro-North American popular imagination.

7 A detailed international history of fairy tale film can be found in Zipes (2010).

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In fact, the fairy tale as interpreted by Disney has so saturated mainstream Euro-North American culture and gained such legitimacy through market dominance and repetition that his versions of *Peter Pan, Pinocchio,* "Cinderella," "Snow White" (ATU 709), and other tales have become the modern source text with which any newer adaptations must engage (as Christy Williams argues in this volume). Thus, Zipes concludes that Disney has cast a spell over the fairy tale genre—both literary and cinematic—displacing the classic literary and traditional versions. That enchantment is dangerous, he warns, because the deeply conservative ideology of Disney productions—meant to "amuse and pacify the rebellious instincts" of audiences—puts spectators into a deep sleep of political apathy and acceptance of the status quo (1994, 140).

One film theorist has argued that "suspension of motility on the part of the spectator allows for a partial identification of the film process with the dream, countered by the greater elaboration of the film system and by the fact that the image perceived as real constitutes a concrete perceptual content in the cinema (the images and sounds of the film itself)" (Rose 1988, 144). Others concur. Many fairy tales also have a dreamlike quality, as Holbek characterizes them. But at times that dream is a nightmare. For example, Zipes sees "Hansel and Gretel" (ATU 327A) as a tale that rationalizes parental abandonment and abuse of children and exemplifies the patriarchal rule of the father as well as the "male Christian God" (1997, 47). For Zipes, though, the tale also echoes social reality, especially since "many women died in childbirth in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, [and] numerous men, left with motherless children, remarried and brought stepmothers into their own homes" (Ibid., 49). Since social expectations governed priority of food to men and children in times of scarcity, it is easy to understand why a woman might want to turn out members of the family who were not her own offspring. Rather than a functional reassurance that the child and family would survive, tales like "Hansel and Gretel" could be baldly stating the worst imaginable circumstances. Thus, as with films of fantastic voyages, fairy tale films about monstrous dreams can be based in reality.

Nevertheless, the present collection proceeds from the awareness that there remain exceptions to the dystopic vision of the fairy tale film that Zipes describes. Innovative films—often made for television, including Jim Henson's *The Muppet Show* (directed by Peter Harris and Philip Casson, 1976–81) and *The Storyteller* (directed by Steve Barron and Jim Henson,

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1988), and Shelley Duvall's *Faerie Tale Theatre* episodes (directors including Roger Vadim, Nicholas Meyer, Tim Burton, and Francis Ford Coppola, 1982–87)—succeed in "breaking the Disney spell," according to Zipes.[8] But the authors in this collection have found other examples of animated and live-action cinema—for children and adults alike—that displace or disregard the Disney paratext. While some of the films considered in the following chapters are entertaining and escapist, others are deeply political. Opening up the focus from fairy tale films proper—those that employ the structure of a recognized fairy tale—to cinematic folklore more generally—which draws upon folkloric motifs commonly found in traditional culture—invites speculation on the many Hollywood, international, and independent productions that incorporate these motifs and narratives across a variety of genres and to varying degrees (see the essays by Cristina Bacchilega and John Rieder, Tracie Lukasiewicz, Sidney Eve Matrix, Brian Ray, and Naarah Sawers).

In their analyses of a wide range of films, the authors in this anthology largely concur with Marina Warner's observation that this popular medium can reflect and reify the status quo. Yet alternately conservative ("safe, compliant with prevailing convention") and controversial ("resistant, Utopian") fairy tale films can provide audiences with innovative, imaginative, and even magical ways of dealing with the crises of everyday life (1993, 34–35). However, we doubt that these examples are sufficient to address Zipes's concerns that fairy tales—though immensely popular—discourage social transformation, and therefore their popularity is fundamentally conservative. Nevertheless, there is no question that the cinema analyzed in this collection effectively demonstrates a widening of fairy tale film, extending far beyond Disney's—and Zipes's—visions and versions.

Fairy Tale Films for Adults

Fairy tale films and cinematic folklore for adolescents and adults, usually live-action productions—sometimes incorporating significant visual effects—span across the genres from horror to erotic thriller, romantic comedy to

8 Often less heavily capitalized, and overall less expensive, television allows experimentation in style, format, and content that doesn't exist in Hollywood. Increasingly, however, the success of independent cinema is changing the rules and opening up the previously tightly controlled circuits of production and distribution within the mainstream film industry.

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psychological melodrama, fantasy to science fiction. These fairy tale readings manifest the resurrection of the sexual, violent, and supernatural elements of folktale that existed in oral tradition but were censored for children's literature. In this sense, contemporary, sometimes radical, and innovative filmmakers such as Guillermo del Toro (see Lukasiewicz), Steven Spielberg (see Sawers), Nietzchka Keene (see Greenhill and Brydon), Neil Jordan (see Kim Snowden), and Tim Burton (see Ray) appear to have returned to the roots of folklore's darker elements. As Maria Tatar notes, for anyone familiar with the Disney paratext, the experience of reading the German (or French) versions on which it draws can be eye opening due to the mutilation, murder, incest, terrible punishments, cruelties, and other atrocities commonplace in most tales (1987).

Similarly, in *Off With Their Heads! Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood,* Tatar argues that most classic children's literature aims for progressive socialization, enforcing conformity through violent coercion and a pedagogy of fear (1992). Such cautionary tales follow audiences from childhood to adulthood, as is immediately evident by the works of cinematic folklore analyzed in this collection. Many are dark. Some incorporate evil magic, supernatural elements, and haunting special effects that mesmerize and enchant audiences (think of *Pan's Labyrinth,* discussed by Lukasiewicz and by Bacchilega and Rieder, or *AI: Artificial Intelligence,* directed by Steven Spielberg [2001] and examined by Sawers, for example). They can even inspire moral panic. Consider the reception of the Harry Potter series (discussed by Ming-Hsun Lin) or *The Golden Compass* (directed by Chris Weitz, 2007, analyzed by Bacchilega and Rieder), or other films alleged to promote Satanism, for example (see Overstreet 2007).

Apart from computerized special effects, however, sexual and moral ambiguity remains a standard feature of fairy tale films for adults, accounting for the narrative tension and suspense that keep audiences attentive. Whereas Disney characters represent either pure innocence (such as orphans) or unadulterated evil (often stepmothers), cinematic folklore intended for mature audiences deals in shades of grey. Ultimately characters' motivations are largely unknown in films such as *The Juniper Tree* (see Greenhill and Brydon), *The Company of Wolves* (directed by Neil Jordan, 1984; discussed by Snowden), *Enchanted* (see Linda Pershing and Lisa Gablehouse), *Eyes Wide Shut* (considered by Matrix), and *MirrorMask* (directed by Dave McKean, 2005; discussed in Bacchilega and Rieder). In each example, male

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and female characters struggle with eternal questions about identity, power, love, lust, and belonging—the human condition.

Live-Action and Animation in Fairy Tale Films

In the winter of 2007, Disney unveiled *Enchanted,* a hybrid film that mixes animated sequences with live-action footage. A modern princess tale (though the main female character is not literally royal), this romantic comedy follows the protagonist's enchanted journey through time and space to land in the alien world of Manhattan. Not surprisingly, the only way to break the spell cast upon her by a jealous evil crone is with love's first kiss. Billed as a fairy tale film for adults, *Enchanted* rewarded delighted audiences with its many tongue-in-cheek references to earlier Disney classic fairy tale films. This explicit self-referentiality evidences the fact that most mature theatergoers have grown up on Disney animations and are thus well schooled in the significance of talking animal helpmates, gags and slapstick comic relief, musical interludes, double entendres, the romantic, heterosexual, happily-ever-after guarantee, and other Disney conventions.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Steven Spielberg's *AI: Artificial Intelligence* can explicitly (and more-or-less faithfully) incorporate significant portions of Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* narrative and still not be universally or instantly recognized as a fairy tale film (see Sawers). Disney's animators have stamped a cartoon vision of the boy puppet on the popular imagination in indelible ink. Theoretically speaking, moving from animation to live action is already a step outside the Disney paratextual boundary, yet the majority of the essays in this volume address primarily live-action cinematic folklore.

Even if they cannot be properly classified as animations, the special effects and computer graphic imagery (CGI) that are largely responsible for the magic of a Harry Potter film (see Lin; or other magical voyage films from *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian* [directed by Andrew Adamson, 2005, 2008] to *The Lord of the Rings* series [directed by Peter Jackson, 2001–3] or *Star Wars* [directed by George Lucas, 1977]) clearly continue in the tradition of the early animation and puppet films of Méliès and his contemporaries.[9] Digital special effects (DFX) have become standard fare for blockbuster movies, which means that

9 In fact, in his work on digital cinematography, Lev Manovich argues that—due to the proliferation of special effects in Hollywood blockbusters—mainstream live-action cinema can no longer be distinguished from animation (1999).

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the fantastic and grotesque creatures, supernatural trickery, other-worldly terrains, and inhuman acts capable through CGI are no longer confined to science fiction and fantasy films.[10] When the wonder tale comes to life on the silver screen, DFX animation artists are largely responsible for the enchantment of spectators—though the Hollywood celebrities who appear in fairy tale films may take issue with that statement!

Genre Migrations and Folklore Mutations in Fairy Tale Films

Setting special-effects animation aside for the moment, many examples of cinematic folklore in live-action cinema are classified as melodramas, thrillers, and horror films. In some cases, the films share or echo the title of a folktale or tale character, such as *La Belle et la bête* (*Beauty and the Beast;* directed by Jean Cocteau, 1946), *The Juniper Tree, Bluebeard* (directed by Edward Dmytryk and Luciano Sacripanti, 1972), *The Gingerdead Man* (directed by Charles Band, 2005), *Snow White: A Tale of Terror* (directed by Michael Cohn, 1997), *Hansel & Gretel* (directed by Gary Tunnicliffe, 2002), *Baba Yaga* (directed by Corrado Farina, 1973), *964 Pinocchio* (directed by Shozin Fukui, 1991), *Kvitebjørn Kong Valemon (The Polar Bear King;* directed by Ola Solum, 1991), *The Red Shoes* (directed by Michael Powell, 1948)*, Peau d'âne (Donkeyskin;* directed by Jacques Demy, 1970), *Snow White: The Fairest of Them All* (directed by Caroline Thompson, 2001), or *Sydney White* (working title *Sydney White and the Seven Dorks*, directed by Joe Nussbaum, 2007). In other cases, some familiarity with the source is needed to identify the film as a fairy tale adaptation, as in *Secret Beyond the Door* (directed by Fritz Lang, 1948) or *The Stepford Wives* (directed by Bryan Forbes, 1975)—both "Bluebeard" tale types—or *The Thief of Bagdad* (directed by Raoul Walsh, 1924)—from the *Arabian Nights* tales.

The task of spotting cinematic folklore embedded in films that give no overt clues to their roots and intertextuality involves a subtle impression of déjà vu as part of its spectatorial pleasure. That uncanny sense of familiarity—of a submerged story haunting the narrative on-screen—requires some detective work by the film critic. A search of the literature in film and folklore-friendly fields reveals some creative interpretations of films such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (directed by Tobe Hooper, 1974), *The*

10 Blackford (2007) discusses links between science fiction and fairy tale film.

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Piano (directed by Jane Campion, 1993), and *Notorious* (directed by Alfred Hitchcock, 1946) as "Bluebeard" tale types; *Dirty Dancing* (directed by Emile Ardolino, 1987) as "The Ugly Ducking"; *Pretty Woman* (directed by Garry Marshall, 1990) and *Maid in Manhattan* (directed by Wayne Wang, 2002) as versions of "Cinderella"; *Splash* (directed by Ron Howard, 1984) as "The Little Mermaid"; and *Hable con ella (Talk to Her;* directed by Pedro Almodóvar, 2002) as a modern interpretation of "Sleeping Beauty" (ATU 410). In this volume, essays on what at first appear unlikely candidates for cinematic folklore include Stanley Kubrick's erotic thriller *Eyes Wide Shut* as a version of "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" (ATU 306); Chris Wedge and Carlos Saldanha's animated wonder *Robots* (2005) as an updated *Pinocchio;* and Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride* (2005) and *Edward Scissorhands* as animated and live-action retellings of the legend of "Venus and the Ring" and the "Beauty and the Beast" folktale (ATU 425C), respectively.

To make the case that some of these films, especially those with adult themes, are fairy tales in disguise requires some familiarity with folklore tale types and motifs and comfort with the notion that "no fairy tale text is sacred," as Maria Tatar has observed (1992, 229). Indeed, in her investigation into contemporary migrations and metamorphoses of fairy tales in film and television, Marina Warner, tongue in cheek, accused critics of seeing "Bluebeards" and "Cinderellas" "here there and everywhere" (1993, 27)! Yet as already mentioned, fidelity to the source is not the only measure of the value of a fairy tale film adaptation or remake, nor is it the best one.[11] *Adaptation,* understood as "repetition without replication," may involve a degree of faithful homage in its alteration or translation of the text, but fidelity may just as easily reside in critique as it does in imitative tribute (Hutcheon 2006, 7).

With each reinterpretation, incorporation, or transposition of these familiar stories, tellers create new tales to serve contemporary needs. The process of revisiting classic tales renders them defamiliarized or strange, thus opening up the possibility of a shift in perspective that encourages the audience to reflect anew on these stories that have ossified as part of the bedrock of cultural narratives (Tatar 1992). Many modern fairy tale films and examples of cinematic folklore are best understood as transfigurations or transmutations of folktales since they incorporate varieties of

11 For an overview of debates in fidelity criticism, see Welsh and Lev (2007); and Sanders (2006).

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transtextuality—embedded interlinked texts—theorized by Gérard Genette (1997). Once the focus of the fairy tale film expands beyond the classic Disney animations, it becomes immediately apparent that there are numerous examples of the kind of resolutely unfaithful cinematic folklore adaptations that Robert Stam would describe as "less a resuscitation of an originary word than a turn in an ongoing [intertextual] dialogical process" through which the filmmaker engages with the source (2004, 25). As Stam argues, the range of cinematic adaptations extends far beyond homage or critique to include filmic rewritings, resuscitations, resignifications, and even cannibalizations of literary or oral texts. These processes reflect various intentions on the part of the filmmaker, ranging from changing to correcting, echoing, or experimenting with the original story (Ibid.).

Postmodern Adaptations

From thinking about the range of adaptive approaches in cinematic folklore, it is a short leap to considering the postmodern elements in many fairy tale films. In *Postmodern Fairytales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*, Cristina Bacchilega notes how frequently the narratives and motifs associated with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Cinderella,* and other Disney classics are deconstructed and recombined in popular culture. Their storylines, props, and characters are so thoroughly engrained in the imagination that audiences instantly recognize elements of them in the artwork and advertisements of commercial culture, not to mention jokes, songs, and cartoons. These fragments act as "bait," Bacchilega argues, to catch the viewers' or hearers' attention, drawing them in through nostalgic childhood memories (1997, 2). The postmodern approach to fairy tales is perhaps best illustrated by *Shrek* (directed by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson, 2001), *Shrek 2* (directed by Andrew Adamson, Kelly Asbury, and Conrad Vernon, 2004), and *Shrek the Third* (directed by Chris Miller and Raman Hui, 2007). Originally based on William Steig's literary fairy tale, this trilogy is an animated "Beauty and the Beast" tale type that shamelessly inverts the classic story line.

Thus, the beautiful princess metamorphoses into a monster, rather than being the agent of disenchantment who returns her beastly bridegroom to human form, as is the case in most versions. Moreover, the *Shrek* films present a folkloric montage of characters and motifs from well-known tales, nursery rhymes, and legends, including "Puss in Boots,"

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"The Gingerbread Man/Runaway Pancake" (ATU 2025), "Robin Hood," "The Three Little Pigs" (ATU 124), "Little Red Riding Hood," *Peter Pan,* "Snow White," and a miscellaneous cast of fairies, witches, dragons, dwarfs, and enchanted animals. The result is a multilayered literary and oral fairy tale remix, wherein the conventional and innovative merge and blend. The spectator's pleasure results from predicting the familiar plot twists and turns and being pleasantly surprised to be both correct and incorrect. This postmodern retelling of the value-added "Beauty and the Beast" is, as Bacchilega observes of other tales, a composition of multiple possible stories—authorized and unauthorized, at times parodic, and overall transformational vis-à-vis the source texts (1997, 23). Similar postmodern productions that are explicitly self-referential include the made-for-TV films *The 10th Kingdom* (directed by David Carson and Herbert Wise, 2000) and *Into the Woods* (directed by James Lapine, 1991). Both, like *Shrek,* sample and remix many fairy tale stories, themes, and motifs into a new adventure that delivers a kick of déjà vu to spectators, as did *The Princess Bride* (directed by Rob Reiner, 1987). These cinematic montages reveal a postmodern doubling as they unsecure the narrative integrity of the classic tales while remaining faithful to the overarching generic conventions, albeit modernized in some cases.[12]

Other postmodern remixings and transmutations of folkloric elements are considerably more subtle than the *Shrek* comedies. Filmmakers may insert sampled references or fragmentary narrative parallels that engage yet disrupt the earlier text. Innovative use of folktale figures and tropes is evident in *Lady in the Water* (directed by M. Night Shyamalan, 2006), a postmodern engagement with Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" that amplifies the ancient supernatural power of the sea nymph so she is no longer a tragic romantic figure but, instead, humankind's savior. Similarly *Star Wars* incorporates many recognizable elements of L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* into a very different kind of adventure narrative about an extraordinary extraterrestrial journey and the ultimate battle between good and evil.

To extend this consideration of postmodern fairy tales, Maria Nikolajeva (1998, 2003) observes that one recurrent feature of these stories is the presence of *heterotopias*—otherworldly realms, where reality appears topsy-turvy

12 For more on fairy tales and postmodern doubling, see Bacchilega (1997), who argues that, according to this textual approach, the tales can resist and reify conventional discourses of sex, gender, race, and power.

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and terrible, fabulous, supernatural events and beings question all that is commonsensical and familiar. They are often shot as surrealist dream sequences—as in *The Company of Wolves* (a version of "Little Red Riding Hood") or *The Matrix* (directed by Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, 1999) and *Vanilla Sky* (directed by Cameron Crowe, 2001), which both combine elements of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with "Sleeping Beauty." They may also incorporate elements of grotesquerie and the carnivalesque—such as in the shocking "flesh fair" scene in *AI: Artificial Intelligence.* Heterotopical elements in postmodern fairy tale films unsettle the conventions of the genre to the extent that these films may be better understood as what Lutz Röhrich (1991) sees as antifolkloric texts.

Fairy Tales and Genre

Although the happy ending remains a crucial convention of most fairy tales, in the antifolktale there may be only an unsettling sense of closure, perhaps better understood as a narrative resolution, according to Röhrich. In this way, among others, modern cinematic folklore corresponds to, and departs from, generic conventions of the fairy tale. Genre classifications serve a purpose insofar as they shape audience expectations and offer a kind of narrative scaffolding for theatergoers. Genre distinctions provide spectators with a discursive framework and analytic vocabulary, tools with which to evaluate and enjoy the work. Audio and visual cues are encoded in genre films, and spectators anticipate sequences—in the soundtrack, editing, and camerawork, for example.[13] In the case of fairy tale films, stock characters and familiar plotlines form the basic generic imperatives with which filmmakers grapple. Those working with fairy tales are surely aware of the need to strike a balance between the pleasure of the familiar and the excitement of the unexpected when incorporating stylistic conventions of the genre.

Genre filmmakers know that their work will be received and evaluated in the light of generic predecessors. The Disney paratext provides the most obvious measuring stick for any fairy tale film. As the essays in this volume attest, however, the concept of genre is likely more constricting than constructive when studying even a small selection of fairy tale films that are otherwise classified as romantic comedy, erotic thriller, animated family film,

13 For more on film classifications see Berry (1999).

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melodrama, and horror film—to name only a few of the different kinds of cinema included in this collection.

How then do audiences, critics, and analysts read fairy tale film as a subgenre of fairy tales in general? Some readers argue that the texts can be readily decoded. But we concur with Donald Haase that "fairy tales consist of chaotic symbolic codes that have become highly ambiguous and invite quite diverse responses; and . . . these responses will reflect a recipient's experience, perspective, or predisposition" (1993b, 235). Indeed, Haase feels that "irresponsible readings may ensue, but they nonetheless reflect the actual conditions of most fairy tale reception" (Ibid., 238–39). Perhaps he would find some filmed fairy tales "irresponsible readings," particularly when they ignore historical context or favor a univocal or stereotypical view. But what seems most noteworthy to scholars of fairy tale film is the relative freedom of auteurs to riff almost endlessly on the same tales. A brief look at our filmography shows considerable historical and geographic range, and yet the tale types and literary sources in these versions are relatively few. We might go so far as to argue that, statistically, a familiar tale like "Cinderella" stands a much greater chance of being retold for the nth time than a less-well-known example like "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" or even the alleged great classic "The Juniper Tree" (ATU 720).

Also highly noteworthy is the lack of women directors in this genre, even though many argue that fairy tales are quintessentially women's texts. This deficiency may be more indicative of the glass ceiling in the film industry, not only in Hollywood but worldwide, which denies women access to what is arguably the most central position in filmmaking. The exceptional writer/director Nietzchka Keene's *The Juniper Tree* was independent and low budget—and sadly, her death in 2004 to pancreatic cancer marks an end to her contributions (Memorial Resolution 2005). Even when taking writers into account, the picture improves only slightly (and probably becomes worse proportionally since most films credit only one director and may have two or more writers). Too often, also, the credited writer is the author or collector of the source, rather than the cinematic creator.

Christian Metz argues that "film is like the mirror. But it differs from the primordial mirror in one essential point: although, as in the latter, everything may come to be projected, there is one thing and one thing only that is never reflected in it: the spectator's own body. In a certain emplacement, the mirror suddenly becomes clear glass" (2004, 822). Metz speaks of mirrors since a fundamental premise, not only of film scholarship but of filmmaking itself, is that viewers should be able to identify with the characters at

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some level. The notion of identification is central to Bacchilega's use of the same simile to describe the fairy tale genre:

> Like a magic mirror, the fairy tale reflects and conforms to the way things "truly" are, the way our lives are "truly" lived. As with all mirrors, though, refraction and the shaping presence of a frame mediate the fairy tale's reflection. As it images our potential for transformation, the fairy tale refracts what we wish or fear to become. Human—and thus changeable—ideas, desires, and practices frame the tale's images. Further, if we see more of the mirror rather than its images, questions rather than answers emerge. Who is holding the mirror and whose desires does it represent and contain? . . . This mirroring . . . is no value-free or essential distillation of human destiny, but a "special effect" of ideological expectations and unspoken norms. (1997, 28–29)

Thus, the mirror of fairy tale film reflects not so much what its audience members actually are but how they see themselves and their potential to develop (or, likewise, to regress). The fairy tale film's frame—not only the physical limits of what it actually shows but also its containment in time and space—allows an often-succinct and telling expression. Its metaphorical flexibility means that viewers can potentially return at different times and receive different, sometimes even contradictory, impressions of the film's meanings and intentions. Nevertheless, we suggest that within the genre of fairy tale film—apart from Disney—experiments, departures, and innovations predominate.

Experiments, Departures, and Innovations

Sometimes what a particular reader sees as a fairy tale film involves extensive reading in. Some may argue, for example, that Matrix's discussions of fairy tale references in *Eyes Wide Shut* or Sawers's analysis in *AI: Artificial Intelligence* stretch the notion of fairy tale film nearly beyond recognition. Often these references are located in a single image—although the resulting consideration of fairy tale connections can greatly enhance both the fairy tale and the film as intertext. For example, *Hard Candy* (directed by David Slade, 2005) alludes to "Little Red Riding Hood" primarily through the image of the girl's red hoodie (see Bacchilega and Rieder; see also Greenhill

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and Kohm 2009). However, the reference not only deepens the film's meaning as a narrative about revenge against Internet stalkers and pedophiles but directly relates it to a series of other films that share that reference.[14]

Similar links can illuminate the specifics of fairy tales—for example, the idea that they maintain their own geography. Activist folklorist Vivian Labrie charts a construction in some traditional fairy tales where a helper—a stock figure in the genre who assists the hero with her/his tasks—structurally positioned between a powerful figure and an incumbent, aids the latter when they form an alliance. The young protagonist of the fairy tale moves through a specific physical space, locating a particular road, crossing "troubled waters," and climbing stairs to confirm identity and find success (1997, 152). Labrie notes that this structure exists not only in the tale generically designated "The Magic Flight" (ATU 313) but also in two American films of the late 1980s, where young neophytes contrive to make it in the capitalistic corporate world—*Working Girl* (directed by Mike Nichols, 1988) and *The Secret of My Succe$s* (directed by Herbert Ross, 1987)—as well as in a French show-business film, *Trois places pour le 26* (directed by Jacques Demy, 1988) (Labrie 1997).[15]

14 "Little Red Riding Hood" pedophile films include not only *Hard Candy*, *Freeway* (directed by Matthew Bright, 1996) and *The Woodsman* (directed by Nicole Kassell, 2004) but arguably also *Little Red Riding Hood* (directed by David Kaplan, 1997). Linking these works also allows consideration of the "Little Red Riding Hood" narrative's influence on contemporary Euro-North American understanding of criminality in other films about pedophilia (see Greenhill and Kohm 2009).

15 Labrie designates the hero(ine)—the main protagonist who seeks a better job, adventure, and/or marriage—"Person one"; the gatekeeper—the daughter, secretary, or wife—"Person two"; and the patriarch—the king or boss—"Person three." She notes both the exploitative sexual relationship between Person two and Person three (for example, the boss in *The Secret of My Succe$s* has apparently married for money) and the incestuous and/or undisciplined relationship between Person one and Person two (for example, in the same film, ambitious protagonist Brantley Foster [Michael J. Fox] has a sexual, and later a professional, relationship with his aunt, who is also his boss's wife).

Labrie's analysis explains the way those who are positioned relatively low in a hierarchy can attempt to use sexual relationships to advance their positions. She points out that such relationships are structurally violent because they predispose the authority figure to exploit the subordinate. But she also shows that these connections are problematic because they fail to change the patriarchal institutional dynamic, thus perpetuating the monstrous nightmare. However, Labrie also argues that Person two, in the role of gatekeeper, opens possibilities to change an exploitative situation:

> The knowledge associated with a Person two position is at least as strategic as it is stressful; she speaks both the inside and the outside languages and, although uncomfortable, her borderline situation gives her the possibility of translation

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Other voyages detailed in this book are partly geographical, but they are also cerebral and sometimes even spiritual. At times, though, the journey simply returns to the location where it began. Thus, Bacchilega and Rieder's contribution presumes fairy tale hybridity, but rather than expecting that quality to be invariably subversive, they emphasize its contradictions and clashes. Thus, *MirrorMask*, *Spirited Away* (directed by Hayao Miyazaki, 2001), and *The Golden Compass* may be genre bending, but they also tend to be gender normative. Similarly Pershing and Gablehouse look at the recent Disney offering, *Enchanted,* which transports characters from an animated to a live-action world. But it also takes its audience on a journey that reveals a need literally to enchant everyday life. The film proposes that its Disneyfied fairy tale romance is viable in the real world as long as the girl finds the right divorce lawyer/prince.

The journey to otherworldliness is more difficult to render in live-action fairy tale films. However, a distinctive aesthetic is evident in *The Juniper Tree,* filmed in Iceland by an American feminist director who sought realism even in her representation of the magical but also specified a melancholic historicized chronotope. Greenhill and Brydon's analysis of this film describes—not surprisingly, given its auteur—its reading of the world as complex and nuanced, rather than a reproduction of conventional notions of gender often understood in fairy tales and their films.

Lukasiewicz, considering *Pan's Labyrinth,* looks at the interaction between nonfictional and fairy tale expectations in what she calls *neomagical realism.* Its fantasy world impinges on reality exclusively through one character. In the concluding resolution, no one within the filmic diegesis but Ofelia sees the gigantic faun who gives her the final, most crucial task. Whichever vision the audience takes as real—Ofelia's or everyone else's—it is clear that both the real and the fairy tale world incorporate monstrous creatures and monstrous acts. Sawers, using both *AI: Artificial Intelligence*

> in either direction. As an intermediary between the makers of rules and their subjects, Person two retains the real balance of power—when she becomes aware of it—and thus, in life as well as in art, she can become a major agent of social change—once she decides to make use of her position. (1997, 163)

This means that when Person one proceeds to the position of boss or king, thanks to the critical help of Person two, he or she has the choice of changing the relationships with others around them from exploitative to cooperative because of Person two's lesson on the importance of alternative values—a wonderful vision indeed. In her own social activism, Labrie uses folktale analyses in action research to work with marginalized people, such as those receiving public assistance, to help them see through and understand their positions and the ways they may positively influence them.

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and *Robots* as her touchstones, considers capitalism's alliance with technoscience to profit from people's desire for the perfect child: the commodification of the child/body under contemporary capitalism. The films appear to offer happy endings, but read through a critical materialistic lens, their dénouements become more threatening.

Ray discusses the oeuvre of Tim Burton, specifically the folkloric elements in *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), *Corpse Bride,* and *Edward Scissorhands.* In Burton's work, he argues, the dreamlike images both overshadow and embody the stories' identities and realities. Matrix considers the motifs and narrative structure from "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" in Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* to explore issues of sexuality and power in cinematic folklore. Again in this film, the potential happily-ever-after is very much dependent upon the spectator's position. Marriage is thoroughly deconstructed, and the perspectives of husband and wife seem irreconcilable.

Feminist views on fairy tales have long been incorporated into the scholarship on the genre. As detailed by Haase (2004a), from its very inception (arguably with Alison Lurie's "Fairy Tale Liberation" in 1970), feminist fairy tale scholarship has refused the easy association of the compliant, mainstream, Disneyfied view of the genre to a simple reproduction of patriarchal stereotypes about women.[16] Feminist readers of fairy tales have consistently understood the ambivalent and multivalent positions on gender that traditional tales offer (e.g., Bottigheimer 1986 and 1987). Far from simply depicting the way women are oppressed by unrealistic expectations of beauty and youth, fairy tales can offer multiple perspectives on the positions of women and men in current times (e.g., Preston 2004) and the multitude of locations where they have historically been found (e.g., Bottigheimer 2004).

Not coincidentally some feminist film theorists have sought unconventional gender messages in what initially appear to be very conventional films. Most notably Carol Clover's work on "slasher films" suggests that their focus on what she calls the "final girl"—the androgynous, resourceful, gender-ambiguously named character who becomes the triumphant survivor—requires its teenaged male audience to identify themselves across sex,

16 Though arguably even the Disney Corporation is capable of producing potentially revolutionary visions of gender and race relationships (Barr 2000). And some feminist criticism denies any possibility that fairy tales can have liberating readings (e.g., Lieberman 1972).

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sexuality, and gender boundaries.[17] Clover does not see the final girl as a simple protofeminist development of a bold heroine (instead of a bold hero) but instead shows the way she reverses the conventional investigatory and voyeuristic gaze (usually a male gaze on a female object) (1992). Similarly complex readings deepen the works included in the book.

Snowden looks at *The Company of Wolves* and Angela Carter's wolf stories, exploring feminist pedagogy to work with these texts. She considers the process whereby students—many initially blinded by the Disney paratext—may come to understand both fairy tales and feminism in more complex ways as a result of considering radical revisions of both generic and ideological narratives. Christy Williams reads the presumption that *Ever After* (directed by Andy Tennant, 1998) is a feminist version of "Cinderella" critically. She suggests that simply reversing patriarchal binaries—making the primary female character strong, confident, politically astute, and forceful, instead of weak, doubting, naïve, and self-effacing—is insufficient to create an image of a postpatriarchal world. However, she also affirms that the text allows the audience to imagine an alternative ending. Finally, in another reversal of expectations, Ming-Hsun Lin approaches the understanding of *Harry Potter* films unconventionally, arguing that Harry takes the position of the conventional heroine, a kind of male Cinderella. Though the film versions offer a much more muted view of the books' gender-bending propensities, they nevertheless bring a feminist perspective to the screen.

Talewards

This collection of essays by no means covers the range of the genre of the fairy tale film because it is heavily skewed toward Euro-North American productions in English. Even within that cultural subcategory, this study addresses feature-length films much more than short works, and live action much more than animation. Though this perspective is in large part a result of the interests of the writers, it also lends some coherence to the work. Many of the best-known tales and films—not always linked together—in Euro-North American culture are represented in this book. We leave it to those who follow to extend their reach beyond these limitations.

17 Fairy tale storytellers and audiences, similarly, may be unconstrained in their identification with main characters by their sex or even their species (Greenhill 2008).

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As scholars and teachers of fairy tales, film, and folklore, we have witnessed firsthand the delight and dismay that students experience when decoding, dissecting, and discussing these stories. From the beloved Disney favorites revisited through the rosy lens of childhood nostalgia, to the deep investment and near-fanatical attention to detail that fans of the epic chronicles of J. R. R. Tolkien, J. K. Rowling, or C. S. Lewis bring to the classroom—the academic study of fairy tale film is a high-stakes endeavor! Add to this mix a measure of cynicism that other students (and even faculty colleagues) may feel (initially at least) when approaching a cinematic genre that seems, at best, to be diversionary kid stuff or, at worst, utterly facile, predictable, disposable low-culture trash.

Inevitably, however, once the sceptical soul steps one, then two, feet in the direction of appreciating the richness, diversity, and complexity of fairy tale films, a powerful seduction takes effect. Fairy tale films and cinematic folklore are endlessly intriguing, with something for everyone in their visions of ambiguity: a little blood and guts, some mystery and whodunit, hair-raising adventure, saccharine romance, suspense, epic battles, unlikely heroism, magic and fantasy, dazzling special effects, a bit of the weepies, fetching costumes, timeless stories, tragedy, terrible truisms, and still more. As the late psychoanalyst and fairy tale theorist Marie-Louise von Franz reported, "Fairy tales represent something very much removed from human consciousness. I once heard [Carl] Jung say that if one interprets a fairy tale thoroughly, one must take at least a week's holiday afterward, because it is so difficult" (2002, 11). So wickedly, pleasurably, exhaustingly, and rewardingly so. Enjoy!

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